

**SOUTH-EASTERN RAILWAY.  
GENERAL STATEMENT OF  
THE POSITION AND PROJECTS  
OF THE COMPANY. 1845-6**

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**VARIOUS**

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*South Eastern Railway Company (England)*

**SOUTH-EASTERN RAILWAY.**

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**GENERAL STATEMENT**

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**1845-6.**

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SOUTH-EASTERN RAILWAY OFFICE, LONDON TERMINUS,  
27TH DECEMBER, 1845.

THE Directors of The South-Eastern Railway have considered it desirable to place before the Proprietors a Statement of the position of the Company, with reference to the projects which it is intended to present to Parliament in the next Session. In doing this, it will be necessary to refer in some detail to past events, and to trace the progress of the Company from an early date.

It is apparent to those who have the responsible management of the affairs of this Company, that its interests have suffered from the want of a full understanding of its position and policy, and this more especially in the districts through which a large portion of the proposed new works will pass. Rival projects have arisen, and misrepresentations have been put forth. The Directors have hitherto abstained from any notice of these misrepresentations, being satisfied that the soundness of the extensions which they should have to present would form the best answer, and that the character of their policy would be better exemplified by their acts than by any professions in anticipation; but they consider that the time has now come when a sense of justice to the Shareholders requires that an explicit statement of their position should be made, in order to bring their case fully and fairly before the public and the local interests of the district. With this view they are taking steps to have the whole of the Evidence given before the Committee of the

House of Commons of last Session on the Kentish Lines of Railway printed, feeling confident that its perusal will afford the best answer to the misrepresentations of rival parties, and will lead any unprejudiced mind to the same conclusion as the Committee, by whom the competing North Kent projects were unanimously rejected.

In the meantime, however, they think it desirable briefly to recapitulate a few of the leading facts connected with the position of the South-Eastern Company, in order to enable their Shareholders, and the public of the South-Eastern district, to understand distinctly and appreciate the principles upon which they claim the sanction of Parliament for the schemes proposed by them to complete the South-Eastern Railway system.

The construction of a Railway through the County of Kent was first projected in the year 1825, and surveys were then made, and again in 1832 and 1835. Those who have seen the South-Eastern District only under its recent excitement on the question of Railway Communication, can have little notion of the change of feeling which has taken place on the subject since those dates.

The Promoters of a Railway from London to Dover examined the country on the Northern side of the County. The project met with no local encouragement from the Towns, and with violent and almost universal opposition among the Landed Proprietors. The system was not understood either in or out of Parliament. The powers of the Locomotive were little known, and it appeared that, to obtain in that direction the gradient then considered as the maximum surmountable by the engine, enormous expense must be incurred.

The capacity of a Railway to compete successfully with parallel Steam Navigation had not been brought to the test, and the results of such a competition were distrusted.

The passage of the Medway at Rochester was con-

sidered a barrier almost insurmountable; and those who had the guardianship of the bridge shrunk from even communicating with a party who could be so wildly speculative as to propose a Railway from London to Dover. Between Canterbury and Dover too, the Works (difficult even now with all the intermediate experience) were considered as entirely beyond the reach of any remunerative scheme, and parks and pleasure grounds intervened, which could not be avoided. To attempt to pass through these with a Railway was, with the then state of feeling in Parliament, too extravagant to be thought of. The force of public opinion has long since brought such objections to their true bearing, and it is difficult now to appreciate the importance which attached to them in the early days of the Railway System. They were sufficient, however, in 1832 and 1833 to extinguish the projects in that direction. The period had not arrived for a Railway in North Kent.

The parties who promoted the South-Eastern Line entered on the subject after a considerable interval subsequent to the abandonment of the early projects through North Kent. They satisfied themselves that the true Line for a Railway to Dover lay through Maidstone. Surveys were made and the district was examined; and, after these steps, application was made to the principal landowners along the Line. Deputations visited Maidstone and other places in the district. They were, however, met here, as on the northern side of the county, with the most decided opposition. The leading parties in Maidstone almost unanimously declared, not against the Line in question only, but against any Line of Railway whatever through Kent; and throughout Maidstone and the vicinity, after much exertion, not a single individual could be found to support the project, whilst for many miles in each direction, the landowners combined to oppose it. These steps were taken in 1834 and 1835. It is scarcely possible to convey



now an accurate idea of the ridicule and contempt with which the project of any Line of Railway whatever to Dover was *at that time* treated in Mid Kent.

In 1835 the London and Croydon Railway Bill passed. The success of this measure before Parliament was materially aided by the circumstance of its not affecting prejudicially any important private property, and adopting the Line of the old Canal, which had proved a failure. There was at the same time, in 1835, a strong expression in Parliament, that the country should not be "cut up" in various directions by Railways, but that the existing outlets should be adopted as far as possible. The Croydon Railway was indicated as the outlet both for Kent and for Brighton; and the Promoters finding themselves excluded by the local opposition from the more direct course, decided on adopting the Croydon Railway and the Weald Line, following out the principle then laid down, by making it for the first distance out of London common to a Line to Brighton.

The Projectors of the South-Eastern Line were from the first aware of the imperfections of the Croydon Railway as a main outlet; and they accordingly, in their first plans, surveyed and deposited a Line from the South-Western Railway to Croydon; but on coming into Parliament in 1836, they received from the then Speaker a strong intimation that no second outlet would be permitted to the South; and acting on this intimation, they abandoned the part of their project which lay between Croydon and Wandsworth, and commenced their Line at the termination of the Croydon Railway at Croydon.

The Line through Tunbridge and the Weald of Kent was strongly supported by many of the most influential landowners and the district generally; and the inhabitants of the large towns north of the Line had at the first too mean an opinion of the capabilities of a Railway to

view it with any jealousy. As the South-Eastern Company proceeded and gained strength the subject excited more attention, and the spirit of speculation which arose in the spring of 1836 much contributed to this. Two parties came forward when the Bill was before Parliament with rival schemes, but although it was strongly opposed on these and other grounds in its later stages, it passed by a large majority.

The following extract from the Report of the Committee of the House of Commons will illustrate the state of opinion, in 1836, on the subject of the Kentish Lines, *and the extent of accommodation which would be required.*

“ That the South-Eastern Line, independent of the engineering advantages presented by the great extent of natural level through the Weald of Kent, appeared to your Committee to be superior to both the said contemplated Lines\* in its essential features as connecting London with Dover and the Continent; that it traverses the centre of the district between the Thames and the British Channel in a line nearly straight, and level for a distance of upwards of forty miles, where no means of water communication exist; that the agricultural districts in the Weald of Kent are greatly in want of improved communications, *and that the Line of the South-Eastern Railway forms a Main Trunk, which, from its central direction, presents facilities of extension, by means of Branches on both sides, not only to most of the principal towns in the county of Kent, but also to several important districts in Surrey and in East Sussex,* and to the southern coast, the towns and fisheries of which will derive from it the most essential benefits.

\* The Central Kent Line and the North Kent Line.

“ That the Promoters of the Line called the ‘ Central Kent Railway ’ failed in proving their case to the satisfaction of your Committee, in an engineering point of view, and that such Line is, from its direction, not calculated to afford such extended advantages as the South-Eastern Railway.

“ That the engineering Evidence on the Northern Line, or Kent Railway, did not establish a case in detail before your Committee ; but it appears to be a Line which, as connecting the Port of Ramsgate, and other large towns in the North of Kent with London, and showing public advantages, may, for such purposes, entitle it to consideration hereafter, provided it could be shown that such a Line may be accomplished without insuperable engineering difficulty. But your Committee do not, for the reasons before stated, consider it eligible as a Line from London to Dover.”

The extent to which the principle of Parliament—that what was then termed the unnecessary intersection of the country by Railways should, as far as possible, be discountenanced—was carried in 1836, was most forcibly illustrated in the House of Lords in that year, in the case of Mr. Stephenson’s Brighton Line, through Leatherhead, Dorking, and Horsham. This Line had, after a severe contest, been adopted by the House of Commons by a large majority, but before it reached the House of Lords the South-Eastern Bill had received the Royal Assent. The mere suggestion of this fact—that there was a Line recently granted, which passed for twenty miles South in a direction which might be available for Brighton also—was sufficient to induce the Lords to throw out the Bill through Leatherhead and Dorking.